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# George Washington

AS MAN OF LETTERS

JAMES HOSMER PENNIMAN, LITT. D.



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TO GIVE A CLEARER IDEA OF THE CHARACTER  
OF WASHINGTON IS TO SET A HIGHER  
STANDARD FOR AMERICAN  
PATRIOTISM

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# GEORGE WASHINGTON

## AS MAN OF LETTERS

George Washington had an extraordinary respect for higher education, and was always inclined to overestimate what he considered his own deficiencies in this regard; but, though he never went to college, Washington's education was so comprehensive that Patrick Henry said of the First Continental Congress, "If you speak of solid information and sound judgment, Colonel Washington is unquestionably the greatest man on the floor."

The delegates who attended this Congress were the ablest body of men who up to that time had met in America; among them were John and Samuel Adams, Roger Sherman, John Jay, Richard Henry Lee and Patrick Henry. It was of this Congress that Chatham said in his speech in the House of Lords, January 20, 1775, "For myself, I must declare and avow that in all my reading and observation—and history has been my favorite study—I have read Thucydides, and have studied and admired the master States of the world—that for solidity of reasoning, force of sagacity, and wisdom of conclusion, under such a complication of difficult circumstances, no nation or body of men can stand in preference to the general Congress at Philadelphia." Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, who speaks with authority about Washington, says "of all the fiction and of all the calumnies about this man, the most singularly without foundation is the belief early held by many that he was uneducated."



When George Washington was sixteen his school days were over and he was earning his living as a surveyor. He had then received a common school education that was particularly thorough in mathematics, for which he showed remarkable aptitude. He also had been well trained in that greatest of all English classics, the Bible, the study of which began at his mother's knee and continued throughout his life. I have seen, in the Library of Congress, Bible references which young Washington entered in a pocket notebook. With the exception of an interlined note, all the entries in the family Bible are in his writing. Washington read the funeral services over General Braddock, and as a young officer frequently read prayers and the Scriptures to his men. He read the Bible to his family with reverence and with distinct enunciation.

March 5, 1794, Washington wrote Charles Thompson that he had finished reading the first part of his translation of the Septuagint. Washington spent many hours of his life in church, where he was an attentive listener and where he obtained a great deal of knowledge of the Bible. His nephew, Robert Lewis, said that he had accidentally witnessed Washington's private devotions in his library both morning and evening, and had seen him kneeling with an open Bible before him, and that this was his daily habit. Washington went to his library at four in the morning, and, after his devotions, spent the time till breakfast in writing and study. He also spent an hour in his library before retiring at night. When he died, the open Bible from which Mrs. Washington had been reading to him lay on a chair by the bedside.

A large part of Washington's education he gave himself, for he was always learning. He was edu-



cated in the school of adversity, by his heroic efforts to make the most of the desperate circumstances in which he was placed, by the great operations in which he was the leading actor, by his association with the cultivated and influential men and women of his time, beginning with his father and mother, his brother Lawrence and Lord Fairfax, and including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. As he rode about the country he talked with the farmers, and persons of intelligence everywhere found him an attentive listener. Such was his skill in recognizing natural ability that he learned much from plain men like the bookseller Knox, the blacksmith Greene, the farmer Putnam and the teamster Morgan. Though Washington's only journey beyond the limits of what is now the United States was a voyage to Barbados when he was nineteen, few men of his time traveled more extensively in our own country and none observed more accurately and intelligently. The most useful lessons that Washington learned were not contained in books. He developed sharp eyes, well-trained muscles and keen wits. He learned how to take care of himself and of those who were with him in the forest and in the camp. He learned the ways of wild and domestic animals. Horses and dogs recognized in him their master. He learned how to treat their ailments, and even how to set their broken limbs. He became skilled in outdoor sports, hunting, fishing, swimming and woodcraft. He learned how to manage canoes, how to swim horses across swollen streams, how to blaze trails and how to make fires and camps in the open. The acquisition of knowledge was with Washington always the acquisition of power, and he constantly admired the best things of his time, which in itself is culture. A man is distinguished by what he takes

an interest in. It is not so much what he knows as what he really wishes to know and the practical use that he makes of his knowledge that determines his usefulness in the world. When George Washington took an interest in anything, it was an active interest. For example, he delivered the most eloquent speech made at the Virginia Convention in 1774. It was, "I will raise one thousand men, enlist them at my own expense, and march, myself at their head, for the relief of Boston." Washington made a point of knowing how to do useful things, and the range of the subjects to which his thought was directed extended over a wide field. His character was based on an enormous capacity for hard work and for taking pains. He was able to accomplish great results with small means, because method and system were ingrained in his nature. He was exact because he was truthful.

The various matters that he had in charge were arranged in separate compartments of his mind. Nothing was confused, everything was in order and could be referred to promptly. He had such control over his thoughts that he could turn from the building of a plow to the building of the Constitution without the loss of time or energy. He was a thinker, trained to focus his mind and concentrate his attention until he had worked out a subject in all its possibilities. His lifelong habit of writing out his ideas in exact language was a great aid to his clear thinking. With a constant attention to details, unusual except in little men dealing with petty affairs, his life moved along broad lines, and his iron will held him steadfast to the things of permanent value for the advancement of his country.

Except its letters, no property throws such light upon the spiritual life of a family as its books.

Judged by this test the moral and intellectual standard of the Washingtons was very high. Most of the Washington books are preserved in the Boston Athenaeum, though a number are in other collections. They are not only of a superior character, but they contain autograph inscriptions which repay careful study.

The nature of the parental training which young George received may be understood when we see on the title page of a volume of sermons by the Bishop of Exeter what is probably the earliest specimen of Washington's penmanship, his name written twice, when he was eight or nine years old. In *Short Discourses upon the whole Common Prayer* by the Dean of Durham, George Washington, at the age of thirteen, wrote his own name and that of his mother; and years before, his father, Augustine Washington, had written his name with the date 1727, to this after his marriage was added "and Mary Washington." Next to the Bible, Mary Washington valued Sir Matthew Hale's *Contemplations* and Hervey's *Meditations*, and her copies of these pious works, in which she has written her name, are still preserved. George Washington when a boy read and reread the *Contemplations* to his mother, and it had a great influence in forming his character.

In the Athenaeum are the first and second volumes of *Steel's Guardian*, with Washington's autographs at the age of seventeen.

Washington's autograph, written also at the age of seventeen in a Latin Testament, is one of several indications that as a boy he had studied Latin. On the flyleaf of a Latin Lexicon of Homer published in 1742 is written:

Hunc mihi quaeso (bone Vir) Libellum  
Redde, si forsan tenues repertum,

Ut scias qui sum sine fraude scriptum.  
Est mihi nomen.  
Georgio Washington,  
George Washington,  
Fredericksburg,  
Virginia.

We get closer to the real Washington when we see a book in which he has written his autograph and marginal notes and placed his bookplate. It would be hard to find a more fitting motto for a man of action than that of the Washington family on his bookplate, EXITUS ACTA PROBAT, a quotation from Ovid, which may be translated: The result is the test of the acts. The result in his case was the United States, and the acts were the memorable series of his glorious deeds at Dorchester and Trenton and Princeton and Valley Forge and Monmouth and Yorktown. He may have been thinking of the EXITUS in his motto when he wrote the words which crown the Washington arch in New York, "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event (EXITUS) is in the hand of God."

Throughout his life Washington was a systematic book-buyer. His library was a growth. Long before Emerson advised it, he bought in the line of his genius, and his books indicate his constant advance in that self-education which was essential to the intelligent discharge of his duties as a farmer, as a soldier and as statesman.

The years before the Revolution were important ones in the life of Washington, for they were a period of study and mental growth preparing him for the serious business that was to follow. For fifteen years continuously he was a member of the House of Burgesses of Virginia. There were two or three



sessions a year, and it was his custom to be present from the beginning to the end of them. He then became intimate with the able men of Virginia, and developed his powers by discussing the many important matters which came up for consideration. It was then that he received the training in parliamentary procedure which fitted him to be a member of the two Continental Congresses, to preside over the Constitutional Convention, and to serve eight years as President of the United States. Sparks says, "His influence in public bodies was produced more by the soundness of his judgment, his quick perceptions and his directness and undeviating sincerity, than by eloquence or art in recommending his opinions. He seldom spoke, never harangued, and it is not known that he ever made a set speech or entered into a stormy debate. But his attention was at all times awake. He studied profoundly the prominent topics of discussion and, whenever occasion required, was prepared to deliver his sentiments clearly and to act with decision and firmness." When his nephew was elected to the House of Burgesses, Washington wrote him: "Speak seldom, but on important subjects and such as particularly relate to your constituents. \* \* \* Make yourself perfectly master of the subject." That Washington did this is shown by the fact that so many of the books in his library relate to law, politics and government. These Washington pondered over.

Before attending the Constitutional Convention in 1787 he made a careful study of Montesquieu and various other writers on systems of government, paying especial attention to the ancient and modern confederacies. There is a paper in Washington's handwriting which contains an abstract of each, in which are carefully noted their chief characteristics, the kinds of authority they possessed, their modes

of operation and their defects. The confederacies analyzed are the Lycian, Amphictyonic, Achæan, Helvetic, Belgic and Germanic. This study, added to his own intimate knowledge of the system of government of the nation and of his own State, gained by long and active experience, rendered him especially fitted to preside over the Convention. No man had more influence than Washington in the formation of the document of which Gladstone wrote, "The American Constitution is the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man."

During his Presidency, Washington was constantly going over the official papers and making abstracts of their contents, which he arranged in logical order. He thus fixed important points in his mind and obtained a comprehensive view of the entire subject. Monroe's "View of the Conduct of the Executive of the United States," with Washington's marginal notes, is now in the Library of Harvard University.

Washington was among the first of his time in that fundamental department of culture—agriculture. When a young man he made full summaries of Tull's and of Duhamel's Husbandry and of the Farmer's Compleat Guide. Tull's Husbandry was probably the first important work that he studied, followed by Duhamel, which was based on Tull. The Gentleman Farmer, by Henry Home, Lord Kames, was one of Washington's principal guides. In the Library of Congress is a transcript he made of portions of it, forming a volume of one hundred and fourteen manuscript pages. In 1784 he made a complete summary of Higgins on Calcareous Cements. Washington's library contains thirty-one volumes of Annals of Agriculture by Arthur Young. Mr. W. C. Ford says:



"In closely written notebooks Washington jotted down what attracted his notice in the Annals, classifying his notes by articles, and particular attention being paid to grains and roots, courses of crops and cattle."

Washington wrote that few of the many works which have been written on agriculture are founded on experimental knowledge, and most are contradictory and bewildering. August 15, 1786, he wrote Theodorick Bland, "I shall always be happy to give or receive communications on improvements in farming, and the various branches of agriculture. This is, in my opinion, an object of infinite importance to the country. I consider it to be the proper source of American wealth and happiness, whose streams might become more copious and diffusive; if gentlemen of leisure and capacity would turn their attention to it, and bring the results of their experiments together; nothing but cultivation is wanting. Our lot has certainly destined a good country for our inheritance."

Throughout the Revolution, George Washington wrote a weekly letter to Lund Washington, giving directions about the management of Mount Vernon. These letters were sometimes sixteen pages long. Four days before his death Washington completed a system of management for his estate for several years to come, with tables designating the rotation of crops. This was written with care and comprised thirty folio pages. Washington's letters to Arthur Young and to Sir John Sinclair have been published and constitute important additions to the literature of agriculture. He gives the result of his own experience and experiments at Mount Vernon, and the information obtained through circular letters which he sent to farmers in various parts of the country,

asking their opinions on such subjects as the values and rents of land, the average product in different kinds of crops, prices of stock, etc. The clearness and simplicity of the language of Washington's letters on agriculture make them interesting reading more than a century after they were written. They are scientific classics, like Franklin's papers and the essays of Huxley and Tyndall.

The long winter evenings at Mount Vernon gave abundant opportunity for solid study, and there is not lacking evidence that there was such study. Among the thousands of articles which Washington sent for from England before the Revolution are "a candlestick with two lights and a shade to read by," and numerous books for the use of himself and his family. For example, in 1762, Washington ordered from London Smollett's *History of England*, in eleven volumes, and paid three guineas for them. It is a fair assumption that this work was sent for because Washington intended to read it and not as a piece of library furniture. Washington's early interest in English history and literature is shown by a memorandum written in his notebook when he was sixteen "March 15, 1748, Read to the Reign of K; John: In the Spectator Read to 143."

In later years Washington was more occupied in making history than in reading it. His dealings were with men rather than with books, yet he wrote: "A knowledge of books is the basis upon which other knowledge is to be built." He, therefore, diligently collected books and pamphlets on subjects of utility to himself, and any subject that interested him was sure to be of value to his fellowmen. Always a man of affairs, he read for practical information. When he had retired to his library no one dared to disturb him.

He wrote to G. W. P. Custis, "Light reading (by this I mean books of little importance) may amuse for the moment, but leaves nothing solid behind. 'Tis to close application and constant perseverance men of letters and science are indebted for their knowledge and usefulness." May 29, 1797, Washington wrote the Secretary of War from Mount Vernon, where repairs were being made, "It may strike you that in this detail no mention is made of any portion of time allotted to reading. The remark would be just, for I have not looked into a book since I came home, nor shall I be able to do it until I have discharged my workmen; probably not before the nights grow long, when possibly I may be looking into Doomsday book."

The inventory of Washington's books made by the appraisers shows that at his death his library numbered about nine hundred volumes, besides magazines, pamphlets and maps. Compared with other private libraries of his time, his was very large, for then books were expensive and not numerous in America.

A fact which impresses us as we look over the list is that his library contained very little trash, and that most of his books were written to convey information. As might be expected, a large number of works relate to agriculture, military affairs and methods of government, the three subjects to which Washington chiefly devoted himself. There are also numerous sermons and religious books, many of which were presented to the General by their authors, and many were the property of Mrs. Washington, who was a great reader of devotional literature. There are several medical works, which had to be consulted frequently, in a large estate like Mount Vernon, remote from doctors. Complete lists of

Washington's library are common, and it is proposed here to classify only a few of the more important literary works, and to omit those on military affairs, agriculture and politics. Among Washington's literary classics were several editions of the Bible and commentaries upon it; Shakespeare, Pope, translations of the Iliad and Odyssey, Burns, Ossian, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Gulliver's Travels, Swift's Works, Beauties of Sterne, Butler's Hudibras, The Spectator, The Bee, The Letters of Junius, A Translation of Horace, Thomson's Seasons, and Beauties of Isaac Watts. There are numerous American works, such as The Conquest of Canaan, by Timothy Dwight, Freneau's Poems, and The Vision of Columbus, by Joel Barlow.

Washington was fond of books of travel, memoirs and history, especially American history, and his library contained many books on these subjects; among them are Chastellux's Travels, Bartram's Travels, Warville's Voyages, three volumes; Young's Travels, Anson's Voyage Around the World, Moore's Travels, five volumes; Robertson's Charles V, four volumes; Gibbon's Roman Empire, six volumes; King of Prussia's works, thirteen volumes; Charles XII, Hart's Gustavus Adolphus, two volumes; History of Marshal Turenne, two volumes; Historical Memoirs of Frederick II, two volumes; Robertson's America, Heath's Memoirs, Ramsay's South Carolina, Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative, Lee's Memoirs and Gordon's History of America.

Washington's early interest in great commanders is shown by the fact which I have not seen commented upon, that September 20, 1759, he ordered from London busts of Alexander, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, the King of Prussia, Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough. These were all the busts that he ordered, and they are all of men



eminent in the art of war. In 1756 he had written the major of his regiment "to recommend in the strongest terms to you the necessity of qualifying yourself *by reading*." Is it assuming too much to suppose that Washington who, at twenty-two, had stated "my inclinations are strongly bent to arms," by the time he was twenty-seven had made himself familiar, by reading, with the lives and campaigns of these famous generals, and for this reason wished to have at Mount Vernon the companionship and inspiration of their counterfeit presentments?

Throughout his life Washington retained an interest in great commanders. Late in the Revolution he ordered sent him from New York the lives of Charles XII and Louis XV, Peter the Great, Turenne, Vauban, Sully, Gustavus Adolphus, and also Goldsmith's *Natural History* in seven volumes; Robertson's *America*, Locke on the Understanding, Milden on Trees, Vertot's *Revolution of Rome* (if well esteemed), and asks for a catalogue of books. Washington paid \$185 for the *American Encyclopedia* in eighteen volumes, which he directs shall be "bound in gilt calf; and I hope it will be done neatly." Up-to-date works of applied science are noticeable, such as Blanchard's *Journal of the first balloon ascension in America*, January 9, 1793; Jeffries' *Aerial Voyages*, James Rumsey on *Steamboats*, and Fulton on *Small Canals and Iron Bridges*.

Washington's interest in education is shown by the following books: Chapman on Education, Graham on Education, Chesterfield's *Letters*, Locke on Human Understanding, Seneca's *Morals*, and two copies of *Telemachus*. On receipt of Chapman's treatise on Education, Washington wrote the author, "My sentiments are perfectly in unison with yours, Sir, that the best means of forming a manly, virtuous and

happy people, will be found in the right education of youth—without this foundation, every other means, in my opinion, must fail.” Washington’s library contained a large number of pamphlets, mostly on political, agricultural and religious topics, and his sense of their importance is shown by the fact that he had many of them bound, often carefully arranged according to subjects. In one of his books he has noted where the parts have been transposed by the binder. Washington took great interest in geography and had many books on the subject. His Atlas of the World was compiled by the General himself, and had a Table of Contents written by him. Some idea of the extent and accuracy of his study of geography may be formed from the following letter. June 19, 1788, he wrote Richard Henderson, who had sent him certain queries made by persons proposing to emigrate to America, “The author of the queries may then be referred to the ‘Information for those who would wish to remove to America,’ and published in Europe in the year 1784 by the great philosopher, Dr. Franklin. Short as it is, it contains almost everything that needs to be known on the subject of migrating to this country. You may find that excellent little treatise in ‘Carey’s American Museum,’ for September, 1787. As to the European publications respecting the United States, they are commonly very defective. The Abbe Raynal is quite erroneous. Guthrie, though somewhat better informed, is not absolutely correct. There is now an American geography preparing for the press by a Mr. Morse, of New Haven, in Connecticut, which, from the pains the author has taken in traveling through the States, and acquiring information from the principal characters in each, will probably be much more exact and useful. Of books at present



existing Mr. Jefferson's 'Notes on Virginia' will give the best idea of this part of the continent to a foreigner; and the 'American Farmer's Letters,' written by Mr. Crèvecoeur (commonly called Mr. St. John), the French consul in New York, who actually resided twenty years as a farmer in that State, will afford a great deal of profitable and amusing information respecting the private life of the Americans, as well as the progress of agriculture, manufactures, and arts, in their country. Perhaps the picture he gives, though founded on fact, is in some instances embellished with rather too flattering circumstances."

The letters which Washington wrote in acknowledgment of books presented him by their authors were numerous and show sound literary judgment. In writing of agricultural works he nearly always says that he has read them or intends to read them shortly, a statement which he is not so apt to make with regard to books on other subjects. That men of letters in distant places sent him their works is evidence of the immediate recognition by the learned world of his inestimable services to humanity. These books were in many languages, but he could read only those in English. Washington wrote Nicholas Pike, author of Pike's Arithmetic, June 20, 1788: "The science of figures to a certain degree is not only indispensably requisite in every walk of civilized life, but the investigation of mathematical rules accustoms the mind to method and correctness in reasoning, and is an employment peculiarly worthy of rational beings. In a cloudy state of existence, where so many things appear precarious to the bewildered research, it is here that the rational faculties find a firm foundation to rest upon. From the high ground of mathematical and philosophical demonstration we

are insensibly led to far nobler speculations and sublime meditations." August 28, 1788, he wrote Jonathan Edwards, who had sent him his observations on the language of the Muhhekaneew Indians: "I have long regretted that so many tribes of the American aborigines should have become almost or entirely extinct, without leaving such vestiges as that the genius and idiom of their language might be traced. Perhaps from such sources the descent or kindred of nations whose origins are lost in remote antiquity or illiterate darkness might be more rationally investigated than in any other mode." He wrote General William Heath, May 20, 1797. "It gives me great pleasure to hear from yourself that you are writing memoirs of those transactions which passed under your notice during the revolutionary war. Having always understood that you were exact and copious in noting occurrences at the time they happened, a work of this kind will, from the candor and ability with which I am persuaded your notes were taken, be uncommonly correct and interesting. Whether you mean to publish them at your own expense or by subscription is not intimated in your letter. If the latter, I pray you to consider me as a subscriber, and in any event as a purchaser of your production, that you may enjoy health to complete the work to your entire satisfaction, I devoutly pray; and that you may live afterwards to hear it applauded, as I doubt not it will be, I as sincerely wish. If I should live to see it published, I shall read it with great avidity." To James Ewing, who sent him a pamphlet he had written, "The Columbian Alphabet: Being the attempt to new model the English alphabet in such manner as to mark every simple sound by an appropriate character, thereby rendering the spelling and pronunciation more determinate and correct, and the

art of reading and writing more easily attainable," he wrote, February 26, 1799: "It is curious, and if it could be introduced might be useful for the purposes proposed; but it will be a work of time, it is to be feared, before it will be adopted generally."

Washington was a careful reader of the newspapers, and wrote Matthew Carey, the Philadelphia publisher, June 25, 1788: "I entertain a high idea of the utility of periodical publications; insomuch that I could heartily desire copies of the Museum and Magazines, as well as common Gazettes, might be spread through every city, town and village in America. I consider such easy vehicles of knowledge more happily calculated than any other to preserve the liberty, stimulate the industry, and meliorate the morals of an enlightened and free people." Tobias Lear says that on the day Washington was seized with his last illness, "in the evening, the papers having come from the post-office, he sat in the room with Mrs. Washington and myself, reading them, till about nine o'clock, when Mrs. Washington went up into Mrs. Lewis's room, who was confined, and left the General and myself reading the papers. He was very cheerful; and when he met with anything which he thought diverting or interesting, he would read it aloud as well as his hoarseness would permit. He desired me to read to him the debates of the Virginia Assembly, on the election of a Senator and Governor."

Washington subscribed to numerous books, and was one of the principal patrons of letters of his time in this country. Though he refused applications for permission to dedicate books to him, he wrote, March 23, 1787: "I always wish to give every possible encouragement to those works of Genius which are the production of an American." In 1787 he sub-

scribed for twenty copies of Joel Barlow's *Vision of Columbus* at one and one-third dollars each. Washington wrote Lafayette, May 28, 1788, introducing Joel Barlow: "Mr. Barlow is considered by those who are good Judges to be a genius of the first magnitude, and to be one of those Bards who hold the keys of the gate by which Patriots, Sages and Heroes are admitted to immortality. Such are your Antient Bards who are both the priest and doorkeepers to the temple of fame. And these, my dear Marquis, are no vulgar functions. Men of real talents in Arms have commonly approved themselves patrons of the liberal arts and friends to the poets, of their own as well as former times. In some instances by acting reciprocally, heroes have made poets and poets heroes. Alexander the Great is said to have been enraptured with the poems of Homer, and to have lamented that he had not a rival muse to celebrate his actions. Julius Caesar is well known to have been a man of a highly cultivated understanding and taste. Augustus was the professed and magnificent rewarder of poetical merit—nor did he lose the return of having his achievements immortalized in song. The Augustan age is proverbial for intellectual refinement and elegance in composition; in it the harvest of laurels and bays was wonderfully mingled together. The age of your Louis the Fourteenth, which produced a multitude of great Poets and great Captains, will never be forgotten; nor will that of Queen Anne in England, for the same cause, ever cease to reflect a lustre upon the kingdom. Although we are yet in our cradle as a nation, I think the efforts of the human mind with us are sufficient to refute (by incontestable facts) the doctrines of those who have asserted that everything degenerates in America. Perhaps we shall be found at this moment



not inferior to the rest of the world in the performances of our poets and painters; notwithstanding many of the incitements are wanting which operate powerfully among older nations. For it is generally understood that excellence in those sister Arts has been the result of easy circumstances, public encouragements and an advanced stage of society. I observe that the Critics in England who speak highly of the American poetical geniuses (and their praises may be the more relied upon as they seem to be reluctantly extorted,) are not pleased with the tribute of applause which is paid to your nation." September 2, 1783, Washington wrote Mrs. Richard Stockton, who afterwards composed the verses sung by the ladies of Trenton when he was on his way to New York to be inaugurated: "Fiction is, to be sure, the very life and soul of Poetry—all Poets and Poetesses have been indulged in the free and indisputable use of it, time out of mind. And to oblige you to make such an excellent Poem on such a subject, without any materials but those of simple reality, would be as cruel as the edict of Pharoah which compelled the Children of Israel to manufacture bricks without the necessary ingredients." In 1788 he wrote Lucretia Van Winter, a Dutch poetess: "The muses have always been revered in every age, and in all countries where letters and civilization have made any progress—as they tend to alleviate the misfortunes and soften the sorrows of life—they will ever be respected by the humane and virtuous."

The collection of Washington's manuscripts in the Library of Congress, known to be the greatest of any one man in the world, comprises many thousand pages written in a large legible hand, whose simplicity, strength and elegance make Washington's signature an ornament to any document to which it

is affixed. Mr. W. C. Ford has edited the writings of Washington in fourteen large volumes, of at least five hundred pages each. Paul Leicester Ford said truly of this monumental labor of his brother, that it is easily first in importance of all works relating to the great American. Jared Sparks, who wrote what is in many respects the best life of Washington, and edited his writings in eleven large volumes, states that he had in his possession for ten years more than two hundred folio volumes of manuscripts of Washington. No one has had more opportunity for the study of the original Washington documents than Sparks, whose literary performances as historian and biographer, added to his eminent position as president of Harvard, entitle him to consideration when he says that it is not believed that there is in history an instance of a public man who was in the genuine sense of the term more emphatically the author of the papers which received the sanction of his name.

Though Washington had to maintain his correspondence without the assistance of stenographers or typewriters, he has left the enormous number of at least eighteen thousand letters. It is true that during the Revolution and in later years Washington employed the aid of secretaries, but the sense of the letters is Washington's own, and in many cases they are in his writing. Washington's commission as commander-in-chief is dated June 19, 1775; he resigned December 23, 1783. He was, therefore, in command of the army for three thousand one hundred and nine days, and during this time he wrote about nine thousand letters on military business, an average of nearly three a day. Many of these letters are of considerable length, and some were written at times when he was distressed by anxiety, worn by exhaustion, or even in personal danger.



In addition to eighteen thousand letters, the Washington manuscripts in the Library of Congress include numerous diaries, account books, invoices, surveys, speeches, messages, proclamations and codifications and abstracts of important books and documents. In May, 1781, Congress authorized Washington to have all his official papers copied into books. He selected Colonel Richard Varick to take charge of this work, and to classify the papers by a plan arranged by Washington himself. Varick and several clerks were thus employed for two years and a half. Washington wrote Varick January 1, 1784: "The public and other papers, which were committed to your charge, and the books in which they have been recorded under your inspection, having come safe to hand, I take this first opportunity of signifying my entire approbation of the manner in which you have executed the important duties of recording secretary, and the satisfaction I feel in having my papers so properly arranged, and so correctly recorded; and I beg you will accept my thanks for the care and attention which you have given to this business. I am fully convinced that neither the present age nor posterity will consider the time and labor which have been employed in accomplishing it unprofitably spent."

As soon as Washington reached Mount Vernon, after resigning his commission, he was so overwhelmed by requests for aid of various kinds that Mr. W. C. Ford says two volumes might be filled with his replies, which were always carefully and tactfully written. Washington wrote General Knox, January 5, 1785: "It is not the letters from my friends which give me trouble, or add ought to my perplexity. I receive them with pleasure and pay as much attention to them as my avocations will admit.

It is references to old matters with which I have nothing to do—applications which oftentimes cannot be complied with—enquiries which would employ the pen of a historian to satisfy, letters of compliment as unmeaning perhaps as they are troublesome, but which must be attended to, and the commonplace business, which employs my pen and my time:—often disagreeably \* \* \* To correspond with those I love is among my highest gratifications. \* \* \* Letters of friendship require no study, the communications are easy, and allowances are expected and made. This is not the case with those which require researches, consideration, recollection, and the de—I knows what to prevent error, and to answer the ends for which they are written.”

March 8, 1784, Washington wrote John Witherspoon that he had intended “to devote the present expiring winter to arranging my papers which I had left at home, and which I found a mere mass of confusion (occasioned by frequently shifting them into trunks, and suddenly removing them from the reach of the enemy) ; but, however strange it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that, what with company, references of old matters with which I ought not to be troubled, applications for certificates and copies of orders, in addition to the routine of letters, which have multiplied greatly upon me, I have not been able to touch a single paper, or transact any business of my own in the way of accounts during the whole course of the winter.” Many of the papers “relating to the part I had acted in the war between France and Great Britain, from the year 1754, until the peace of Paris, and which contained some of the most interesting occurrences of my life were lost.”

When he retired from the Presidency in March, 1797, Washington brought from Philadelphia to

Mount Vernon a quantity of manuscripts which was so considerable that he wrote, August 4, 1797: "I have not yet opened all my packages of papers, nor can I do it until I have provided some place in which they can be deposited with safety." From Mount Vernon, April 3, 1797, Washington wrote James McHenry that he intended to erect a building "for the accommodation and security of my military, civil and private papers, which are voluminous and may be interesting." July 29, 1798, he speaks of "The moments employed in my usual and necessary avocations, and which at all leisure hours I have been devoting to the arrangement and overhaul of my voluminous public papers civil and military that they may go into secure deposits and hereafter into hands that may be able to separate the grain from the chaff." March 4, 1795, "The letters which I write to acquaintances, or friends, are done at no great expense of time or thought. They are offhand productions, with little attention to composition or correctness; and even under these circumstances are rarely attempted when they interfere with my public duties." October 15, 1797, "I soon found after entering upon the duties of my late public station that private correspondences did not accord with official duties; and being determined to perform the latter to the best of my abilities, I early relinquished the former when business was not the subject of them." Of his method of writing business letters, he wrote his overseer: "Whenever I sit down to write you, I read your letter or letters carefully over, and as soon as I come to a part that requires to be noticed, I make a short note on the cover of a letter or piece of waste paper—then read on the next, noting that in like manner—and so on until I have got through the whole letter and reports. Then in writing my letter

to you, as soon as I have finished what I have to say on one of these notes, I draw my pen through it and proceed to another and another until the whole is done—crossing each as I go on, by which means if I am called off twenty times whilst writing, I can never with these notes before me, finished or unfinished, omit anything I wanted to say; and they serve me also, as I keep no copies of letters I wrote to you, as memorandums of what has been written if I should have occasion at any time to refer to them.”

Mr. Harrison H. Dodge, Superintendent of Mount Vernon, writes me that the discovery of a bundle of original drafts of some of Washington's important letters shows that it was his custom studiously to revise his letters and issue clean copies of them. Corrections of spelling, changes of expression, and words interlined or written on margins are frequent; and, as evidence of the copy having been completed, each letter shows where Washington drew his pen diagonally across the page. Mr. Fitzpatrick, of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress writes me: “One thing, which may properly be considered as belonging to Washington's mathematical and artistic rather than military side, is the regularity, care, spacing, and really beautiful appearance of almost every page of his writing. It is the opinion of Mr. Hunt, the Chief of this Division, that Washington liked to write, that he was pleased with the appearance of his written pages, as, indeed, he well might be. Certainly, a well-constructed page of manuscript, especially where there are indentations and perhaps small groups of figures, can be made an attractive picture.”

Few persons have used as much ink as George Washington, and that the care of ink and the beauty of ink were early matters of importance to him is



shown by one of his school copy books, in which young Washington has written the following receipts: "To keep ink from freezing or moulding. In hard frosty weather ink will be apt to freeze; which if once it doth it will be good for nothing, for it taketh away all its blackness and beauty. To prevent which (if you have not the conveniency of keeping it warm) put a few drops of brandy or other spirits into it and it will not freeze, and to hinder its moulding put a little salt therein."

It was Washington's principle never to allow another to do what he could do for himself, and there is no exaggeration in saying that he was the busiest man in America. Washington, himself, entered in books lists of all articles ordered for his estates and copies of the receipts for them. He kept day books and ledgers, and drew up contracts and deeds with accurate legal knowledge. At Mount Vernon every Saturday afternoon reports were made and registered in books showing how every slave and laborer's time was employed and what crops had been gathered. Washington kept orderly files of the important letters which he received, and copied them into letter books. In later years he used a copying press. He had writing paper watermarked with his name. It is said that he was the first in this country to use the lead pencil and the letter press. From West Point, October 25, 1779, Washington wrote Benjamin Harrison: "Letters of a private nature and for the mere purposes of friendly intercourse are, with me, the production of too much haste to allow time (generally speaking) to take, or make fair copies of them. He wrote December 19, 1796, "My private letters are generally despatched in a hurry, and copies not often taken." To G. W. P. Custis, when a student at Princeton, he wrote, "To acknowledge the receipt of

letters is always proper, to remove doubts of their miscarriage."

Washington's journals tell us of long hours spent at his desk, sometimes when the blue skies arched over his broad fields and his horses were stamping impatiently in their stalls, sometimes when the winter storms were beating on the shingles of Mount Vernon. For instance, his diary for June, 1768, records, 4—at home all day, writing; 18—at home all day preparg. Invoices and Letters for England; 19—Home Do Do. February 2, 1785, "Employed myself, as there could be no stirring without in writing letters by the post and in signing 83 diplomas for the members of the Society of the Cincinnati." After the Revolution it was remarked, "It's astonishing the packet of letters that daily comes for him from all parts of the world, which employ him most of the morning to answer." and Washington wrote that: "my numerous correspondences are daily becoming irksome to me." Horace Greeley used to say that his large private correspondence gave him a better knowledge than others had of the public opinion. How much more is this true of Washington in those days when there was no telegraph and no powerful daily papers to circulate the news—and Washington's ability to interpret the information furnished by his correspondents was astonishing, for he not only looked at things but into them and through them.

Washington's diaries furnish daily records of a considerable portion of his life from the age of sixteen. It is probable that, with the single exception of the Revolutionary period, he did not omit any year in keeping his journals, and that the intervals are due to the loss of his note-books rather than to their not having been written. The first diary, which Washington calls "A Journal of my Journey over the



Mountains," begins March 11, 1748, and continues until April 13. It gives an account of an expedition made with his friend George Fairfax to survey the vast domains of Lord Fairfax, who owned all of the lower part of the Shenandoah Valley. Washington's interest in trees and soil is shown in this journal to have begun when he was a boy, for he writes: "We went through most beautiful groves of Sugar Trees and spent ye last part of ye Day in admiring ye trees and richness of ye Land." He also speaks of "our time being too precious to lose." He tells of much hard work surveying, camping in the open, swimming horses across swollen streams, shooting wild turkeys, one of which weighed twenty pounds, and observing the dances of wild Indians. This diary covers twenty-four pages of a book about six inches long and four wide. Beginning with the last leaf of the same book are eighteen and a half pages of careful memoranda of the results of each day's work. A companion volume contains only the records of the surveys of 1749-50 and shows that Washington was constantly employed at this time. The journal of the voyage to Barbados with his sick brother Lawrence in 1751-52 consists of the remnants of forty-two leaves, but the paper is so poor that much of it has crumbled to dust, and only thirty-two leaves, and those considerably injured, can be made out. Washington gives tables of the log of the vessel, including the weather, wind, speed, course, latitude and longitude and sails sighted. On the voyage the young surveyor studied navigation. The brothers were at Barbados from November 6 to December 22 and were cordially entertained. In spite of the fact that during a good deal of the time George was ill with smallpox, his observations of manners and customs, agriculture and fortifications are accurate and interesting. Man-

uscript diaries between 1752 and 1760 have not come down to us, but Washington's journals of 1753 and 1754 were printed.

Washington wrote the following preface to his account of his carrying to the French commander on the Ohio the protest of the Governor of Virginia against French occupation of Western lands. The narrative extends from October 31, 1753, to January 16, 1754. "As it was thought advisable by his Honour the Governor to have the following account of my proceedings to and from the French on the Ohio, committed to Print—I think I can do no less than apologize, in some measure, for the numberless imperfections of it. There intervened but one day between my arrival in Williamsburg, and the time for the Council's Meeting, for me to prepare and transcribe, from the rough minutes I had taken in my travels, this Journal, the writing of which only was sufficient to employ me closely the whole time, consequently admitted of no leisure to consult of a new and proper form to offer it in, or to correct or amend the diction of the old. Neither was I apprised, nor did in the least conceive, when I wrote this for his Honour's Perusal, that it ever would be published, or even have more than a cursory Reading; till I was informed, at the meeting of the present General Assembly, that it was already in the Press. There is nothing can recommend it to the Public, but this. Those things which came under the notice of my own observation, I have been explicit and just in a Recital of:—Those which I have gathered from report, I have been particularly cautious not to augment, but collected the Opinions of the several Intelligencers, and selected from the whole, the most probable and consistent account." Only two copies of the original edition of this journal are known to exist. It was

copied in most of the colonial newspapers and printed by the British government, because it gave the first proof of hostile acts of the French. This journal shows the shrewdness in dealing with men of different races and conditions, the ability to keep clearly in view the important points of the expedition, and the patient endurance of extreme hardships which were marked features of Washington's character.

Washington's notes of his first military expedition against the French were captured when he surrendered Fort Necessity, and a translation of parts of it published by the French government has been imperfectly re-translated into English. It begins with his setting out from Alexandria, April 2, 1754, and ends abruptly June 27. Of this publication Washington wrote, "In regard to the journal I can only observe in general, that I kept no regular one during that expedition; rough minutes of occurrences I certainly took, and find them as certainly and strangely metamorphosed; some parts left out, which I remember were entered, and many things that never were thought. The names of men and things egregiously miscalled; and the whole of what I saw Englished is very incorrect and nonsensical." It would be of extraordinary interest if the original of this journal and of the papers captured at Braddock's defeat could be located among the French archives.

The next manuscript journal is from January 1 to May 22, 1760, and records incidents of Washington's daily life at Mount Vernon, the weather, visits and the state of his fields and of his stock. From 1760 to 1775 there are nearly continuous journals, with the exception of 1762. These diaries are in interleaved almanacs and relate largely to Washington's estates. From 1768 Washington recorded, "where, how and with whom my time is spent." The

memoranda of his social engagements in Philadelphia while attending the First and Second Continental Congresses and the Constitutional Convention show that he was extremely popular and widely entertained, when not in attendance on public duties. Washington was chosen Commander-in-Chief June 15, 1775, and his diaries end June 19, not to be resumed till May 1, 1781, when Washington writes, "I begin at this epoch a concise journal of military transactions—I lament not having attempted it from the commencement of the War, in aid of my memory and wish the multiplicity of matters, which continually surround me—and the embarrassed state of our affairs which is momentarily calling the attention to perplexities of one kind and another, may not defeat altogether or so interrupt my present intention and plan as to render it of little avail." The journal of 1781 ends November 5. The next journal, from September 1 to October 4, 1784, tells of a tour made to visit his lands west of the Appalachians. There are continuous journals from January 1, 1785, to February 2, 1789, and from October 1, 1789, to June 1, 1791. Washington gives an interesting account of his southern tour from June 2 to July 4, 1791, and another of his trip to Fort Cumberland at the time of the insurrection in western Pennsylvania from September 30 to October 20, 1794. He usually gives in these diaries a description of the situation, productions, industries and population of the places which he visited. The Toner collection includes copies of the diaries from October 1, 1789, to July 14, 1790, and from March 31, 1791, to June 1, of that year, but no one seems to know where the originals now are. Toner's copy also shows the diary from August 14 to December 21, 1795, and for the entire year of 1798. The originals of these two were sold at auction in



Philadelphia in 1907. Mr. Fitzpatrick, who has furnished me with much of this data, tells me that the minuteness and completeness of the weather records in Washington's diaries shows that, like all intelligent farmers, he needed a meteriological record in his farm work; information which now is supplied by the Weather Bureau.

Washington recorded in his diary the state of the moon, the clouds, the direction of the wind, the amount of rain, snow, frost and drought, and when guests arrived and departed. January 8, 1785, is the first entry of the temperature, and doubtless before that date Washington did not have a thermometer. From that time he noted the temperature morning, noon and night, and when he was away Mrs. Washington recorded it for him. When he had company, Washington sometimes omitted the temperature at night. June 21, 1785, must have been a warm day, for he records that the mercury was at 88 at night, which is as high as it seems to have gone at any time at Mount Vernon. It sometimes went as low as 10 degrees in winter, and then retired into the ball, after which the amount of cold could only be estimated. A few specimen entries are: "The horns of the moon were up." "A watery sun which was soon obscured by clouds." January 27, 1772, "At home by ourselves, with much difficulty rid as far as the mill, the snow being up to the breast of a tall horse everywhere. Snowed all day. 28—Violent north wind, very cold, snow drifted in high banks three feet deep everywhere. 29—Sun shone in morning, but by eleven o'clock it clouded up and snowed all night and then turned to rain. February 5, 1788. Mercury in the ball of the thermometer in the morning from which it never rose the whole day, being intensely cold. The river was entirely closed in all

the malignancy of frost. 6—Mercury in the ball all day. 7—Mercury in the ball in the morning, by noon it rose to 24.

The final diary gives an account of Washington's last days, and extends from February 10 to December 13, 1799. It is principally about the weather. The last entry, comprising probably the last words Washington wrote, dated December 13, is as follows: "Morning snowing and abt. 3 inches deep—wind at No.E mer. 30. Contin'd snowing till 1 o'clock—and abt. 4 it became perfectly clear—wind in the same place but not hard—mer, 28 at night." About twenty-four hours after writing these words Washington died.

Reticent in conversation, Washington reveals himself to us with such rare completeness in his writing that, though thousands of books have been written about him, his own letters and diaries form his best biography. They explain the evolution of a great nation as well as of a great man, for they cover more than fifty of the most important years of our history. They show how a loyal colonist, driven by the foolish and unjust measures of the British Crown, developed into the First American. Washington's writings are among the most authoritative and interesting source books on the French and Indian Wars, on the Revolution, on the framing of the Constitution, and on the organization and early administration of our Government. Washington was intimately associated with the notable men of our own country and with many distinguished foreigners. He has left descriptions of the life of a Virginia planter, of the manners and customs of old New York and Philadelphia, and of the wide sections of country over which he made his various journeys. The idea that Washington's was a cold nature would

not prevail if Mrs. Washington had not destroyed after his death all the letters that he wrote her with the exception of one written when they were engaged, and the one announcing his appointment as commander-in-chief, both of which are warm with real emotion. "Since that happy day when we made our pledges to each other my thoughts have been continually going to you as another self."

"My dearest,

"I am now set down to write to you on a subject which fills me with inexpressible concern, and this concern is greatly aggravated and increased, when I reflect upon the uneasiness I know it will give you. I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home, than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad, if my stay were to be seven times seven years. \* \* \* I shall feel no pain from the toil or the danger of the campaign: my unhappiness will flow from the uneasiness I know you will feel from being left alone."

There is considerable evidence that Washington had a lively sense of humor. He has left many playful letters, of which the following to Francis Hopkinson may serve as a specimen.

Dear Sir:—

We are told of the amazing powers of musick in ancient times; but the stories of its effects are so surprising that we are not obliged to believe them, unless they had been founded upon better authority than poetic assertion—for the poets of old (whatever they may do in these days) were strangely addicted to the marvelous; and if I before doubted the truth of their relations with respect to the power of musick I am not fully convinced of their falsity—because I would not for the honor of my Country; allow that we are left by the ancients at an immeasurable dis-

tance in everything; and if they could soothe the ferocity of wild beasts, could draw the trees and stones after them, and could even charm the powers of Hell by their musick, I am sure that your productions would have had at least virtue enough in them (without the aid of voice or instrument) to soften the ice of the Delaware or Potomac, and in that case you should have had an earlier acknowledgment of your favor of the first of December, which came to hand last Saturday. I readily admit the force of your distinction between 'a thing done' and 'a thing *to be done*,' and as I do not believe that you would do 'a very bad thing' "indeed I must ever make virtue of necessity and defend your performance if necessary to the last effort of my musical abilities. But my dear Sir, if you had any doubts about the reception which your work would meet with or had the smallest reason to think that you should need my assistance to defend it, you have not acted with your usual good judgment in the choice of a Coadjutor; for should the tide of prejudice not flow in favor of it (and so various are the tastes, opinions, and whims of men that even the sanction of Divinity does not ensure universal concurrence), what alas! can I say to support it? I can neither sing one of the songs nor raise a single note on any instrument to convince the unbelieving. But I have, however, one argument which will prevail with persons of true taste (at least in America), I can tell them that *it is the production of Mr. Hopkinson.*"

Probably no man ever was busier with public affairs which involved no less than the future of the nation and of the human race and with vast personal and private interests. Yet few have devoted more time and strength to liberal and kindly efforts for



others. There are numerous letters written with painstaking thought, often at times when he was weighed down by public and private burdens, letters by which the affairs of George Washington were in no way advanced.

For instance, in 1769 he wrote William Ramsay, offering to contribute twenty-five pounds a year towards the expenses of Ramsay's son at Princeton, and adding, "No other return is expected, or wished, for this offer, than that you will accept it with the same freedom and good will with which it is made, and that you may not even consider it in the light of an obligation, or mention it as such; for, be assured, that from me it will never be known." Washington wrote John West, January 13, 1775, "What with my own business, my present ward's, my mother's, which is wholly in my hands, Colonel Colvill's, Mrs. Savage's, Colonel Fairfax's, Colonel Mercer's and the little assistance I have undertaken to give in the management of my brother Augustine's concerns (for I have absolutely refused to qualify as an executor), together with the share I take in public affairs, I have been kept constantly engaged in writing letters, settling accounts, and negotiating one piece of business or another; by which means I have really been deprived of every kind of enjoyment."

Washington's poor relations caused him constant solicitude, and the education and advancement of young people were always of interest to him. The many words of advice which he wrote them are so important that from his letters a volume on practical education and ethics might be selected.

Though few are aware of the vast quantity of Washington's writings, fewer still have any idea of their remarkable literary excellence. Washington's

letters and military and political papers show an ability to give accurate descriptions of all the circumstances of a case, their relative importance and the logical course of action to be pursued with regard to them that is not surpassed by any statesman or commander in any age. In his English Notes, Hawthorne records that among the autograph letters of statesmen and warriors of many nations and centuries he saw in the British Museum none so illustrious as those of Washington.

The range of Washington's writings is immense; they treat of military and political affairs, theories of government, finance, agriculture in all its departments, the practical administration of a nation, and of a farm, the nature of soil, the development of western lands, the training and equipment of armies and the management of men, from colonial and revolutionary soldiers to farm hands and slaves. His works have a calm energy worthy of the strenuous times in which they were written and of the great themes of which they treat. Washington was a man with a vision, without which the people would have perished. Love of country was his controlling motive, and his faith in the honesty, intelligence and future of the American people was based upon his comprehensive view of the whole field of American affairs. There is a drive and consecutiveness in his writing which moves steadily onward to his important conclusions. The power of his letters to accomplish the purposes for which they were intended is unusual, if not unequalled. He knew the exact place to apply pressure and the exact amount and kind of pressure to use. He was severe when circumstances made it necessary, but I do not find an ill-natured word in all his writings, and when we consider the troublous times in which many of his letters were

written, their fairness and moderation are remarkable. He saw clearly, and what he saw he put in words that show the object without distortion like a pane of plate glass. If style consists first in having definite and worthy thoughts, and second in clothing those thoughts in accurate language, Washington is a master of style. Good taste pervaded his life, it manifested itself in his household, in his clothes and in his equipages, and it is nowhere more evident than in his writing. Style has been called organized expression. Washington organized his expression in deeds as well as in words, for he was a man of deeds more than of words, and over and above his deeds pervading and inspiring them were an insight and a living faith which made him dare to do what other men only talked about. Washington made a careful study of the methods of writing good English by writing constantly and by reading good models. In his early days he even attempted poetry, and the Rules of Conduct, which as a boy he copied into his school note book, were an influence throughout his life, for his education was based on precept as well as on training. Washington's greatest reward was the knowledge that his work had been faithfully done, and he often refers to it in his writing. This knowledge is said to be the highest satisfaction of which human nature is capable. The most marked quality in Washington's writing is modesty; there is not a word of self-praise, nothing to indicate that he ever thought he had done more than what he called "the great line of my duty."

It is not to be denied that Washington occasionally misspelled a word, but in this respect his letters compare favorably with those of his correspondents in either England or America. If you wish to form an idea of the spelling of the period, read the five

volumes of letters to Washington published by the Colonial Dames. It should be remembered that in Washington's time the standard of English spelling was by no means fixed. Samuel Johnson published his dictionary in 1755, the year of Braddock's defeat, and the dictionary of Noah Webster, who knew and corresponded with Washington, did not appear till six years after Washington's death. It was a considerable time before the effect of these monumental works was felt. Johnson's dictionary was in Washington's library, but it was the edition of 1786. It is said that Washington usually wrote with a dictionary at hand. At any rate he was not only familiar with the technical terms of the subjects in which he was concerned, but he had a large general vocabulary and used ordinary words with extraordinary care. For instance, when George Washington employed the word "gentleman" it was more than an idle term. "I flatter myself" is the commonest expression in Washington's letters, meaning "it gives me pleasure to think," as: "I flatter myself we shall not experience any considerable difficulty."

As might be expected, there are numerous Scriptural allusions in Washington's writings. His favorite reference is to the verse in Micah about reposing under his own vine and fig tree. This occurs over and over again. Washington wrote Marquis de Chastellux, April 25, 1788, "Your young military men, who want to reap a harvest of laurels, don't care (I suppose) how many seeds of war are sown; but for the sake of humanity it is devoutly to be wished, that the manly employment of agriculture, and the humanizing benefits of commerce, would supersede the waste of war and the rage of conquest; and the swords might be turned to ploughshares, the spears into pruning-hooks, and as the Scripture



expresses it, 'the nations learn war no more.'" August 28, 1762, he wrote, "Tobacco is assailed by every villainous worm that has had existence since the days of Noah (how unkind it was of that Noah, now I have mentioned his name to suffer such a brood of Vermin to get a birth in the Ark)."

When Rhode Island was deliberating on the adoption of the Constitution he wrote, June 28, 1788, "The scales are ready to drop from the eyes of Rhode Island." He wrote to G. W. P. Custis, "The wise man, you know, has told us (and a more useful lesson never was taught) that there is a time for all things." He says elsewhere, "In humble imitation of the wise man, I have set down to count the cost," and "Bricks are not to be made without straw." He also refers to the widow's mite. In the last year of his life he wrote, "Six days do I labor, or, in other words, take exercise and devote my time to various occupations in husbandry and about my mansion."

Washington's familiarity with the best literature is evident from the fact that he quotes from writers like Shakespeare, Pope and Addison, frequently with a slight deviation from the text, showing that he cited from memory "As Shakespeare says, 'He that robs me of my good name enriches not himself, but renders me poor indeed,' or words to that effect." He says he sits for his picture, "like Patience on a Monument." He makes an unusual quotation from King Henry V, Act IV, Scene 3, when he writes Mrs. Richard Stockton, September 2, 1783, "Notwithstanding 'you are the most offending soul alive' (that is, if it is a crime to write elegant poetry)." He quotes the line in Pope's Essay on Man, changing it to "as the twig is bent so it will grow." He refers to Cicero's belief in the immortality of the soul, and his familiarity with Cicero is shown in the following

letter which he wrote General Edward Hand, October 2, 1783, "You who have converted the sword into a plough share will learn by experience that happiness dwells in domestic scenes, with a friendly intercourse of the living and the dead—by the dead I mean more benefit is to be derived from a few well selected books than from a large public library. Useful knowledge can have no enemy but the ignorant—it pleases the young, it delights the aged, is an ornament in prosperity and a comfort in adversity. It is not probable that a man will be asked at the day of Judgment his proficiency in Logic and Metaphysics. He who knows what is necessary to his salvation knows sufficient." Though Addison's Cato was not in his library, he often quotes, "The post of honor is a private station," and "'Tis not in mortals to command success." Paul Leicester Ford suggests that Washington probably heard these at the theatre. Washington refers to Pandora's box, to the fox and the sour grapes, and the daw and the borrowed feathers. At the sale of the Fairfax chattels in 1774, Washington bought a bust of Shakespeare.

Washington always had an admiration for the French language, a knowledge of which would have been of great value to him in his early life as a Virginia officer and later during the Revolution, but, though fond of using French words and phrases in his letters, he never attained any proficiency in the language, and as late as 1791 he sent French letters from Mount Vernon to Tobias Lear in Philadelphia to be translated and returned to him. He wrote Dr. Boucher, January 2, 1771, "To be acquainted with the French tongue is become a part of polite education; and to a man who has the prospect of mixing in a large circle absolutely necessary." Some of the French words which Washington uses

are *faupas*, which he writes as one word; *finesse*, *en passant*, *douceur*, *eclat*, *rendezvous*, *dernier resort*, *coup de grace*, *mal a propos*, *hauteur*, on the *tapis*; and military terms, like *corps de reserve*, *feu de joie*, *cul de sac*, and *coup de main*. To General Howe, December 18, 1775, he wrote: "I do expect from you an *eclairissement* on this subject."

Washington uses a number of Latin expressions, among them *imperium in imperio*, *amor patriae*, *statu quo*, *vice versa*, *in terrorem*, *in toto*, *prima facie*, *viva voce*, and *bona fide*. He shows a certain knowledge of legal Latin, sometimes using phrases like *ad quod damnum*. I find in his writings an occasional quaint old-fashioned word like *maugre*, which he uses a good many times; *amusive* and *deceptive*. Writing of mixing fertilizers, he speaks of "*jubling* them well together in a cloth." He also says, "If I should receive it *timously*," and "a considerable *parcel* of salt."

In signing his letters Washington is careful to give to each person the exact consideration due him, and when he writes "Yours affectionately," it is more than a form of expression. The old-fashioned ceremonious way of addressing near relatives is noticeable; his mother is "Honored Madam," and he concludes a letter to John Augustine Washington, "I remain, dear Sir, your most affectionate brother." Writing Governor Trumbull, he signs himself, "With the most perfect esteem and regard." He ends a letter to Lafayette, "With every sentiment of esteem, admiration and love, I am, my dear Marquis, your most affectionate friend." And one to General Knox, "With sentiments of the purest esteem, regard and affection." An amusing subscription is that of G. W. P. Custis, who tells Washington, his guardian and step-grandfather, that he is "dutifully and intrinsically yours."

Washington's appreciation of literary style is shown by the comment he wrote March 19, 1783, on an anonymous attempt to subvert the loyalty of his army, which he says, "In point of composition, in elegance and force of expression has rarely been equaled in the English language." Washington's reply to this communication was so simple and touching that it moved many of his officers to tears. As the General took his manuscript, which no one but him had seen, from his coat pocket, and drew out his glasses from his waistcoat pocket, he remarked, "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country." His address is so admirably expressed that it should be read in its entirety in order to obtain an idea of what Washington could write without the assistance of Hamilton, or Humphreys, or any other of his secretaries. It is possible here to quote but a few lines, though a short extract hardly gives a better idea of Washington's manner of writing than the proverbial brick does of the architecture of a house. "If my conduct heretofore has not evinced to you that I have been a faithful friend to the army, my declaration of it at this time would be equally unavailing and improper. But, as I was among the first who embarked in the cause of our common country; as I have never left your side one moment, but when called from you on public duty; as I have been the constant companion and witness of your distresses, and not among the last to feel and acknowledge your merits; as I have ever considered my own military reputation as inseparably connected with that of the army; as my heart has ever expanded with joy when I have heard its praises, and my indignation has arisen when the mouth of detraction has been opened against it; it



can scarcely be supposed, at this late stage of the war, that I am indifferent to its interests."

Washington's letters to the British commanders were distinguished for their force, combined with refinement and good breeding. His meaning was always clear, and his position so well taken that it was difficult to reply to him. For example, he wrote Lord Howe, January 30, 1778, "There is one passage of your letter which I cannot forbear taking particular notice of. No expression of personal politeness to me can be acceptable, accompanied by reflections on the representatives of a free people, under whose authority I have the honor to act. The delicacy I have observed, in refraining from everything offensive in this way, entitled me to expect a similar treatment from you. I have not indulged myself against the present rulers of Great Britain, in the course of our correspondence, nor will I even now avail myself of so fruitful a theme."

Washington's best known literary production, the Farewell Address, ranks with the Declaration of Independence as one of the famous documents of all time. Lincoln's classic is his Gettysburg Speech, which has been pronounced as perfect as the speeches of Pericles. Washington's classic is the Farewell Address, of which Joseph Choate remarked, "An eminent English historian has said of it that 'there are few compositions of uninspired wisdom that will bear comparison with it,' and such, I believe, is the judgment of all the world." No careful man, however able, would issue such an important paper without first taking the advice of his friends, and Washington consulted a number of people, the chief of whom was Hamilton, but to give Hamilton all the credit for the Farewell Address is as unjust as it is inaccurate. Washington furnished the ideas for the

Farewell Address. Hamilton was the stonecutter who carved the perfect statue in accordance with the designs of the master.

He wrote to Washington, May 10, 1796, "When last in Philadelphia, you mentioned to me your wish, that I should *redress* a certain paper, which you had prepared. As it is important that a thing of this kind should be done with great care, and much at leisure touched and retouched, I submit a wish, that as soon as you have given it the body you mean it to have, it may be sent to me." The italics are Hamilton's. Neither Hamilton nor any other man but Washington had the strenuous experience which makes such a document possible. The mere composition was an easy matter after the thought had been worked out in the brain of the Father of his country.

Abundant examples exist of Washington's ability to express himself with force, accuracy and elegance without the assistance of Hamilton or of any one else, showing clearly that extreme modesty and diffidence with regard to his powers caused him to employ the aid of Hamilton in the composition of the Farewell Address. The original manuscript, entirely in the handwriting of Washington, is now in the New York Public Library. It consists of thirty-two pages quarto letter paper, written on both sides and sewed together. On every page lines are erased and corrections made. Among the earlier papers of Washington which contain the thought of the Farewell Address, are his letters to the Governors of each State, June 8, 1783, and his Farewell to the Army, November 2, 1783. In the former he enumerates four points which he says are essential to the existence of the United States: "1, An indissoluble union of the States under one federal head; 2, sacred regard to public justice; 3, the adoption of a proper

peace establishment; 4, the prevalence of that pacific and friendly disposition among the people of the United States which will induce them to forget their local prejudices and policies; to make those mutual concessions which are requisite to the general prosperity; and, in some instances, to sacrifice their individual advantage to the interest of the community."

Horace Binney, in his exhaustive inquiry into the formation of the Farewell Address, states: "The original conception, the fundamental thought, purpose, or design of this paper was Washington's." He says of the memoranda in which Washington gave his original ideas: "These are golden truths, a treasure of political wisdom, experience and foresight which, from the gravity of their tone, the depth of their sincerity, their simplicity and the tenderness as well as the strength of the concern they manifest for the whole people, make in themselves a 'Farewell Address,' as it were, from a dying father to his children. And they are Washington's alone, without suggestion by anybody—Madison, Hamilton or any other friend or adviser—drawn from the depth of Washington's own heart; and if the whole Farewell Address as it now stands on record were decomposed and such parts dispelled as were added to give the paper an entrance into the mind of statesmen and legislators and to place it among the permanent rules of government, the great residuum would be found in these principles an imperishable legacy to the people. They are the *soul* of the Farewell Address."

Many passages in Washington's writings are remarkable for their felicity. His estimate of Franklin is so just and so beautifully worded that it has been chosen for the inscription on the base of the statue at the Philadelphia Post Office. It is:

“Venerated for Benevolence,  
Admired for Talents,  
Esteemed for Patriotism,  
Beloved for Philanthropy.”

Washington characterized the wanton burning of Falmouth and Norfolk by the British as “flaming arguments for a separation.” He wrote Lafayette, September 2, 1781: “If you get anything new from any quarter, send it, I pray you, *on the spur of speed*, for I am almost all impatience and anxiety.” The italics are Washington’s. His aptness in illustration is shown by the following extract from a letter of November 20, 1780: “Congress will deceive themselves if they imagine that the army, or a State that is the theatre of war, can rub through a second campaign as the last. It would be as unreasonable to suppose that, because a man had rolled a snowball till it had acquired the size of a horse, that he might do so till it was as large as a house.” January 18, 1784, he writes of the dangers of “a half-starved, limping government, that appears to be always moving upon crutches and tottering at every step.”

Washington’s diaries show that he was not only an accurate observer, but that he was a lover of nature, with unusual powers of description. As far as I know the following passages have never been printed. It is not Gilbert White of Selborne, or Henry Thoreau, or John Burroughs, but George Washington who writes: “A great deal of rain fell last night and the heaviest sleet I ever recollect to have seen. The boughs of all the trees were incrustated by tubes of ice quite round, at least half an inch thick—the weight of which was so great that my late transplantations in many instances sunk under it, either by bending the bodies of the young trees—



breaking the limbs or weighing up the roots—the largest pines in my outer circle were quite oppressed by the ice and bowed to the ground, and the largest catalpa trees had some of their principal branches broken.” “A great hoar frost and ice at least one-eighth of an inch thick—what injury this may have done to the fruit and vegetation will soon be seen. The buds of every kind of tree and shrub are swelling—the tender leaves of many had unfolded—the apricot blossoms were putting forth—the peaches and cherries were upon the point of doing the same. The leaves of the apple trees were coming out, those of the weeping willow and lilac had been out many days and were the first to show themselves. The sassafras was ready to open—the red bud had begun to open but not to make any show—the dogwood had swelled into buttons. The service tree was showing its leaf, and the maple had been full in bloom ten days or a fortnight. Of this tree, I observed great difference in the colour of the blossoms; some being of a deep scarlet, bordering upon crimson—others of a pale red, approaching yellow.”

Thursday, April 21, 1785: “Found what is called the spire bush (a fragrant aromatic shrub) in bloom—perceived this to be the case on Monday, also as I returned from Alexandria, and supposed it had been blown two or three days—it is a small greenish flower, growing round the twigs and branches, and will look well in a shrubbery.” In February, 1786, referring to a shrub he had planted, he wrote: “Its light and airy foliage, crimson and variegated flowers, presented a gay and mirthful appearance; continually whilst in bloom visited by the brilliant, thundering humming-bird.”

Washington's writings abound in concise statements of general truths or aphorisms and explana-

tions of his philosophy of life. Here are a few: "From thinking proceeds speaking, thence to acting is often but a single step. But how irrevocable and tremendous." "We must bear up and make the best of mankind as they are, since we cannot have them as we wish." "There is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists, in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and advantage, between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity." "A good moral character is the first essential in a man. It is, therefore, highly important to endeavor not only to be learned but virtuous." "There is but one straight course, and that is to seek truth and pursue it steadily." "Characters and habits are not easily taken up or suddenly laid aside." "It appears to me that little more than common sense and common honesty in the transactions of the community at large would be necessary to make us a great and happy nation." "Every one who has any knowledge of my manner of acting in public life will be persuaded that I am not accustomed to impede the despatch or frustrate the success of business by a ceremonious attention to idle forms." "I can never think of promoting my convenience at the expense of a friend's interest and inclination." "I shall never attempt to palliate my own foibles by exposing the error of another." "Whilst I am in office, I shall never suffer private convenience to interfere with what I conceive to be my official duty." "I am resolved that no misrepresentations, falsehoods or calumny shall make me swerve from what I conceive to be the strict line of my duty." "To persevere in one's duty and be silent is the best answer to calumny." "Why should I ex-

pect to be exempt from censure, the unfailing lot of an elevated station? Merit and talents which I cannot pretend to rival have ever been subject to it." "I could wish to make my conduct coincide with the wishes of mankind as far as I can consistently. I mean without departing from that great line of my duty, which though hid under a cloud for some time from a peculiarity of circumstances may nevertheless bear a scrutiny." "Ingratitude I hope will never constitute a part of my character." "I never wish to promise more than I have a moral certainty of performing." "My opinion is that a young man should have objects of employment. Idleness is disreputable under any circumstances—productive of no good, even when unaccompanied by vicious habits." "Secrecy and despatch may prove the soul of success to an enterprise." "The man who wishes to steer clear of shelves and rocks must know where they lie." "The most certain way to make a man your enemy is to tell him you esteem him such." "The due administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good government."

This last sentence ought to be placed in large letters on the walls of every courtroom, so that judges and lawyers, jurymen and witnesses may have this fundamental truth impressed upon them.

Everything in Washington's writing is simple, natural and real. He writes so clearly that it is not possible to misunderstand him, and his control of language is surpassed only by his control of himself. There is dignity and distinction in his life and in his words. Virtue with him was no abstract quality. It lived and breathed in his every act, so that, though he has given us a record of his life with perhaps unequaled minuteness, there is no word which he or we would wish to have blotted out.

Washington has demonstrated that man's business here is to know for the sake of living rather than to live for the sake of knowing. His principal legacy is not the thousands of pages he has written but himself. England's greatest contribution to the civilization of the world is the works of Shakespeare; America's is the character of Washington.







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